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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001144

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SUBJECT: KENGO SAYS GOVERNMENT IS NEGOTIATING WITH EQUATEUR
REBELS; DISCUSSES LEGISLATIVE AGENDA PRIORITIES AND SSR

REFORM

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Garvelink for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador met December 21 with Senate President Kengo wa Dondo. Kengo said the GDRC is negotiating with Dongo rebels, discussed his legislative agenda for the upcoming session of parliament, and gave his view on security sector reform (SSR). His priorities for the legislative session are IMF eligibility, creation of an Independent National Electoral Commission, and decentralization. Kengo said he expected to make an official visit to the U.S. in coming weeks. End summary.

Dongo: Government talking with rebels

¶2. (C) Ambassador met with Kengo at his request in Kengo's office suite at the national parliament building. Ambassador was accompanied by defense attache and acting political counselor (notetaker). Kengo led off with a discussion of the situation in Equateur, his home province. In a surprise revelation of high-level negotiations between President Kabila's government and Equateur-based paramilitary fighters, Kengo said the principal leader of the Dongo insurgency named a steep price for laying down arms: a flat in Kinshasa. While Kengo quoted Kabila as not objecting to an exchange of property for a return of both peace and displaced persons, the agreement would not absolve culprits from "being pursued by justice." (Note: Kengo's comments came as a surprise as the government has not commented on its contact with rebel leaders nor has the press reported on this. End note.)

Legislative agenda

¶3. (SBU) International Monetary Fund: Kengo said his first legislative priority was meeting IMF assistance prerequisites. Pending draft laws would implement the DRC's poverty reduction and growth strategy, and economic reform programs. Discussing the need for transparency in the open market, Kengo offered a concrete example in the form of a hypothetical infrastructure project that should be open to competitive bidding from domestic, parastatal, and international construction firms -- a process presently obfuscated by the government's preference to award contracts to parastatals.

¶4. (SBU) Electoral Commission: Kengo said it was necessary to establish the National Independent Electoral Commission by March 2010 to prepare for 2011 local and general elections, which Kengo -- echoing other recent interlocutors -- said would take place in February and September, respectively. The governing majority party would appoint four of the seven

commission members, the opposition three. While some local observers protest the lack of civil society participation (represented on the Independent Electoral Commission that administered the 2006 elections), others note that many active in civil society are themselves quite closely tied to politics. Kengo recalled that voting in 2006 was held at the lowest possible administrative level, but it remains to be seen for 2011 whether the village council would operate ballot boxes.

¶5. (SBU) Decentralization: Article 226 of the 2006 Congolese constitution stipulates that within 36 months of ratification the country's 11 provinces would devolve into ¶26. Legislation to bring into effect the new provinces passed in different versions in each chamber, and is now Qpassed in different versions in each chamber, and is now under review before a joint conference committee. Legislative deliberations may be moot, however, given the results of an unfinished report of the constitutional review commission that met in July. The question according to Kengo is whether the 26 administrative areas are "ready for more responsibility." While districts and territories, whose ruling officials are nominated by the Minister of the Interior and approved by the President, have experience with local governance including administering budgets funded by central government tax retrocession, vast tracts of the rural interior are directly administered by provincial governors. Granting autonomy to non-viable political entities tat lack market and basic infrastructure would be counterproductive, Kengo concluded.

SSR: U.S. LIBtraining to be the model

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¶6. (SBU) Security sector reform: Kengo said several SSR laws are currently before each chamber including laws on reforms of the army (FARDC), the national police (NPC), and, in the Senate, armed forces personnel statutes. Kengo said a vote on personnel issues (e.g. recruitment, training, and promotion) would probably be held in the regular parliamentary session set to begin in March 2010. Kengo offered his analysis that it was necessary "to create an army that addresses our needs and performs at an appropriate level. It should be well equipped, well trained, well paid, and capable of rapid deployment to defend Congolese territory." He expressed his support for USG-training of a light infantry battalion (LIB) in Kisangani (septel) and hoped to see it as a model of a Congolese army operating at international standards.

¶7. (C) He said the future footprint of the FARDC would be a force bifurcated between a Western-based unit in Kitona and Eastern-based unit in Kamina. All soldiers would be trained and based at either of these two installations, he said, allowing the army to focus on protecting territorial integrity and the NPC on internal security. He elucidated that recruitment could include mixage or brassage soldiers, but they would have to join new recruits in a common basic training. He described an ideal inductee as over 18 years old, serving a 5-year enlistment, and who is single. The latter provision, Kengo added, would remove family distractions but he clarified that married soldiers would not be excluded from the army; only their families would be excluded from military housing requiring them to stay with relatives. He agreed that pay was a fundamental issue in attracting and retaining soldiers and that mobile banking might be a practicable implementation method, but it was necessary first to know the name, rank, and location of all soldiers and the enlistment rolls are not yet complete.

Trip to the United States

¶8. (SBU) Kengo noted in passing that he intends to travel to

the United States in coming weeks and would visit Washington.

He did not provide details. (Note: Kengo may have downplayed the travel issue so as to avoid the perception he had asked the ambassador to visit him for the main purpose of requesting a visa. A frequent traveler to Europe, where he has family and a home in Belgium, to our knowledge Kengo has not been to the U.S. since the ambassador's arrival in November 2007. Embassy will request meetings for him if his itinerary and schedule permit. End note.)

19. (C) Comment: Kengo, undoubtedly one of the DRC's cleverest politicians and a legendary "survivor" (he served as Mobutu's prime minister on three occasions), was born Leon Lubicz in 1935 to a Polish father and Tutsi mother. He is the only important politician in the DRC who is not a member of Kabila's ruling coalition. Kabila initially tried to prevent him from becoming president of the Senate but later accepted him when Kengo expressed a willingness to work constructively with the majority coalition. Kengo's views are usually reasonable, pragmatic and more open to cooperation with Western partners than are those espoused by many leading Congo politicians. This was evident as he discussed SSR and the U.S. LIB training program in Kisangani. Qdiscussed SSR and the U.S. LIB training program in Kisangani. He is believed to have leaked to the international press that Kabila supporters in parliament were considering changing the constitution to allow the president to remain in office after a second term. Kengo is clearly committed to making the senate a real player in national politics, fulfilling its constitutional role as a check and balance against the executive branch. End comment.

GARVELINK